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ABSTRACT

Harvey Daniels (1994) describes literature circles as small, temporary discussion groups consisting of students who elect to read the same text. As each member assumes specific responsibilities in preparation for the discussion, those members come to the discussion with supporting notes related to his or her role. One elementary teacher refined a reading circle model in her classroom, gradually modifying and changing it, occasionally sharing the model and her experiences with teaching colleagues. Later she learned that reading circles are more widely known as literature circles. In this PEN Digest, she shares her work and that of three other teachers (Jan Verney, Donna Ross, and Melissa Van Bael), as they implemented literature circles within diverse classrooms. The digest explains that, as they modified the basic idea, they were attempting to better meet the need for balance, indicated by reading frameworks, such as the four-resource model and challenge approaches that privilege the literacy practices of some students, while devaluing those of others. First it describes the basic operation of literature circles. Secondly, it offers advice on implementing literature circles for the first-timer and concludes with each teachers' tales of implementing literature circles. (Contains 1 table, 2 figures, and 17 references and sources.) (NKA)

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PRIMARY ENGLISH TEACHING ASSOCIATION PETA

Reading and responding in literature circles

CATHERINE DAY

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How to make reading rich, rather than routine? How to support reluctant readers to read and reread with increasing enjoyment and reward? How to elicit responses that go deeper than 'I liked that one'? If you've asked any of these questions, read on.

ED 480 271

It began when PETA's *Growing into Readers* (Lowe, ed.) arrived in my mailbox at the end of 1994. As I skimmed the contents, a chapter entitled 'Catering for Diverse Needs in the Classroom' (Simpson w. Willson) caught my eye. I made myself a cup of coffee and started to read all about Paula Willson's 'version of literature discussion groups, or reading circles, which caters for a range of interests and abilities in her classroom' (p 40). I was particularly interested in her statement that reading circles 'not only challenge the more capable readers to engage with different genres, but also support struggling and reluctant readers' (ibid.).

Over the next six years I used Anne and Paula's reading-circle model in my classroom, gradually modifying and changing it, and occasionally sharing the model and my experiences with teaching colleagues. It was only when, seven years later, I left the classroom to become a literacy centre co-ordinator that I learnt that reading circles are more widely known as 'literature circles'. This discovery alone is a classic example of how isolated we teachers can become as we struggle to cope with the ever-increasing changes and demands that are a part of being a teacher.

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This *PEN* shares my work and that of three other teachers as we implemented literature circles within diverse classrooms. As we modified the basic idea, we were attempting to:

- better meet the need for balance indicated by reading frameworks such as the four-resource model (Luke & Freebody, 1997)
- challenge approaches that privilege the literacy practices of some students while devaluing those of others (Wade & Birr Moje, 2000).

We will begin 'by the book', though, and describe the basic operation of literature circles before you play with it and make it your own. We recommend it as a good place to start for the uninitiated.

What are literature circles?

Harvey Daniels (1994) describes literature circles as 'small, temporary discussion groups' of students who elect to read the same text. Each member undertakes specific responsibilities as s/he prepares for the discussion, and each comes to the discussion with supporting notes related to her/his role. The circles meet regularly, and the roles rotate. When a text is completed, the group finds ways to communicate its discussion to a wider audience. A new cycle then begins, bringing a new set of participants together. Daniels notes that formal discussion roles may no longer be necessary 'once readers can successfully conduct their own wide-ranging, self-sustaining discussions' (ibid., p 13).

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The steps

Six clear steps can be identified.

1 The teacher presents the texts in a 'book talk'. Students choose texts by ballot. The teacher forms groups.

2 The groups decide how much each member can read before they next meet. Each member is allocated a role.

3 Students complete their reading individually and prepare for their literature-circle discussion.

4 Discussion takes place within the literature circle. At the end, the group decides how much each member can read before they next meet. Each member is allocated a new role.

5 Steps 3 and 4 are repeated until the text reading is complete. The group plans and presents a literature showcase, an extension project and/or a sharing session.

6 The group, individual group members and the teacher evaluate learning progress.

The steps unpacked

1 The teacher presents the texts in a 'book talk'. Students choose texts by ballot. The teacher forms groups.

The teacher selects six or seven diverse novels and presents them to the students, looking at cover, title, author and blurb. From this exposure, the students nominate their first three preferences. Using these preferences and the availability of the novels, the teacher guides the formation of groups.

This introductory 'book talk' should not only help students to choose books, it should encourage wider reading habits. Students who have already read a selected novel could be asked to contribute to the presentation.

How might this stage look across the year levels?

The above process is probably reasonable at all year levels as long as students are independent readers or independently reading at an instructional level, Reading Recovery 21+. Having said that, we advocate ignoring the so-called 'reading levels' of students when they select books.

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2 The groups decide how much each member can read before they next meet. Each member is allocated a role.

The first meeting involves the students coming together as a group for the first time and perusing the novel to decide how much is to be read. At this time, the roles are chosen (page 6). The students have a week in which to read and prepare for the upcoming literature-circle meeting.

How might this stage look across the year levels?

Years 1–3

Teacher guides students as to how much can be read, using the weakest reader as a reference.

Since texts won't be extensive, meetings may occur once or twice weekly.

Teacher introduces a small selection of roles.

Years 4–6

Teacher guides students as to how much can be read, using the weakest reader as a reference.

Students draw roles from a ballot, or rotate. Roles are phased out during the year.

Students use sticky notes to bookmark items that support their role, or topics they wish to discuss.

Years 7–10

Group determines how much will be read.

If practised in using literature circles, students should not need roles (but they could be used initially with selected students).

Students use sticky notes to bookmark topics of personal significance.

3 Students complete their reading individually and prepare for their literature-circle discussion.

Before the circle meets again in a week's time, students read the decided amount. Some teachers allocate time for this; others expect students to complete the reading in their own time. It may be beneficial to provide sticky notes that students can use, as they read, to mark points they wish to refer to during the discussion. As in all aspects of literature circles, the use of these notes will need to be explicitly taught and modelled by the teacher.

How might this stage look across the year levels?

Years 1–3	Years 4–6	Years 7–10
Students have timetabled in-class time to read silently.	Students have timetabled in-class time to read silently and to make necessary discussion preparations (e.g. notes, supported by sticky notes left in the text).	As for Years 4–6. Student responses in written journals may be useful.
Students may receive support from a teacher aide, parent/carer or teacher to get their reading done, or to prepare for discussion.	Students may receive support from a teacher aide, parent/carer or teacher to get their reading done, or to prepare for discussion.	As for Years 1–6.

4 Discussion takes place within the literature circle. At the end, the group decides how much each member can read before they next meet. Each member is allocated a new role.

At the meeting, each student is given the opportunity to share, respond and elaborate. The teacher is a passive participant, tracking students' involvement and understanding of the text. The remainder of the class works independently on tasks such as literature-circle preparation and reading. This is an opportunity to make use of support staff in reading to, or with, other students. At the close of the meeting, roles are rotated and decided upon by the group. The group also negotiates the amount of text to be read before the next meeting.

Teachers or other support staff may support literature-circle discussions in the early phases of their operation. The teacher aims to withdraw support as the enactment of roles and the dynamics of co-operation become self-sustaining.

How might this stage look across the year levels?

Years 1–3	Years 4–6	Years 7–10
Groups meet one at a time.	Groups meet one at a time at first, with the teacher nearby, then all at once.	As for Years 4–6
The teacher leads discussion, withdrawing to an observation role, outside the group, over time.	Once groups are meeting simultaneously, the teacher moves among them, sometimes sitting in.	

5 Steps 3 and 4 are repeated until the text reading is complete. The group plans and presents a literature showcase, an extension project and/or a sharing session.

At this point, a culminating activity, sometimes called a showcase or celebration, can help to bring the text, and the shared reading experience, to a meaningful close.

How might this stage look across the year levels?

Years 1–3	Years 4–6	Years 7–10
The teacher models possible literature showcases (e.g. one a week) using a known text and a student group.	The teacher models the selection of literature showcases, and/or students sit in on showcases occurring elsewhere in the school.	The teacher models the selection of literature showcases if students have had no exposure to them, and/or students sit in on showcases occurring elsewhere in the school.
From a small range of choices, groups choose a literature showcase to present later in the year.	Groups choose a literature showcase when they are familiar with the possibilities.	Groups reach consensus about their literature showcase. Teachers might encourage different types of responses by directing students to a matrix representing levels of cognitive demand and/or intelligences.

When using literature showcases, it is useful to set a time limit on preparation in order to keep things moving, relevant and interesting: students can achieve a lot in an hour if they know that is all the time they have. The type of presentation the group prepares should result from a group consensus on the text. It should articulate the group's reactions to the audience in a way that 'says something new'. Here is a good opportunity to cater for, or extend, students' preferred learning styles. Thus the showcase may incorporate ICTs, debates, panel sessions, dramatic re-enactments, role-plays, readers' theatre and other forms of presentation that synthesise and 're-present' understandings.

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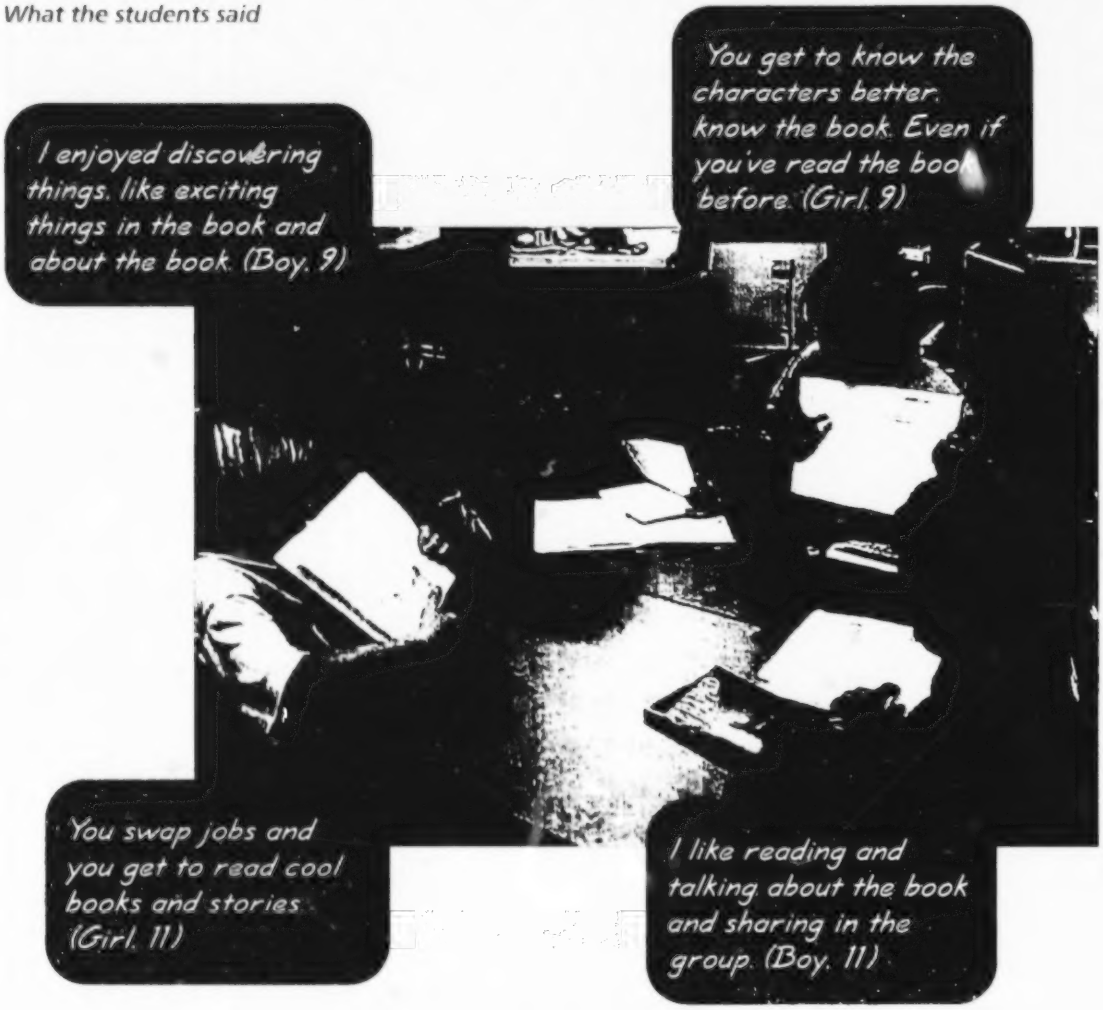
6 The group, individual group members and the teacher evaluate learning progress.

Our team has been most interested in assessment techniques that allow both teachers and students to track and describe movement across a range of abilities, rather than those that allocate a level or mark to student work. Some of the attitudes and capabilities that we feel can be tracked through the use of literature circles are: attitude to reading; ability to connect with the text and construct personal meaning from it; ability to express point of view orally and in print or multimedia; ability to analyse the text critically; ability to reach and substantiate conclusions; attitude and ability to listen to the point of view of others; use of multiple intelligences; ability to meet deadlines.

We have been developing a range of devices and tools for tracking student progress, including student self-assessment, anecdotal notes taken during observations of group meetings, and rubrics (criteria sheets). We have found the 'All America Reads' website to be a useful starting point for developing rubrics for literature circles (see references). At the time of writing, Queensland's English syllabus is in draft form; thus we are yet to develop assessment tools that address specified outcomes.

Negotiating assessment with students has been a challenge. We can recommend the PETA publication *A Year in Texts* (Gehling, 2000:51) for its excellent description of how to negotiate a rubric with students.

What the students said


I enjoyed discovering things, like exciting things in the book and about the book. (Boy, 9)
You get to know the characters better, know the book. Even if you've read the book before. (Girl, 9)
You swap jobs and you get to read cool books and stories. (Girl, 11)
I like reading and talking about the book and sharing in the group. (Boy, 11)

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Implementing literature circles for the first time

We introduced literature circles to our classrooms with the explicit teaching and modelling of the various roles. These were taught using a short set text to which the whole class had access. Another way of teaching the roles is through teacher modelling with a teacher read-aloud novel.

The roles we used initially come straight from the ideas of Harvey Daniels (1994) and others who have drawn on his work. These roles include artful artist, literary luminary, word wizard, creative connector, discussion director and summariser (outlined below). Artful artist was the first role introduced, due to its simplicity and the instant-enjoyment factor. Literary luminary and word wizard followed because they had the potential, with teacher support, to be relatively easily understood by all students. Finally, creative connector and discussion director were introduced. These roles require a deeper understanding of the text and are not as easily grasped. Each role was taught to the class as a whole.

The roles

Summariser offers a brief overview of the reading. This role is randomly chosen on the spot, and is used to open the meeting.

Literary luminary selects an interesting part of the reading to share. S/He offers a statement justifying the choice.

Artful artist depicts a part of the reading (e.g. a character, a moment, a setting). S/He offers a statement justifying the choice.

Word wizard selects four words that might be challenging or interesting. S/He provides a definition for each, along with an activity (e.g. hangman, word scrabble, mime, celebrity heads, synonyms, antonyms).

Creative connector finds a way to link the reading to her/his own life, world knowledge and/or other texts.

Discussion director devises a number of questions about the reading. These should be open-ended, e.g. 'Why do you think ...', 'What if ...', 'What do you predict ...', 'How is this like ...'.

Here is an example of a role-description card developed by one of our team, Jan Verney.

THE CONNECTOR

Your job is to find a way to connect what you have read today to something that might happen, or has happened, in real life.

Try to connect to:

- your own life
- similar events at other times and places
- other people's problems that you are reminded of
- other parts in this book
- other books you have read
- something in the newspaper or on television.

In your book:

- write your own personal connections as 'dot' points
- write two questions that will prompt the group to make connections.

When you meet with your group, share your connections, then ask the group your two questions to begin some discussion.

Grouping

I have to admit that I used to manipulate literature-circle groups to suit my own purposes. I liked to have five groups reading five different books. While I tried hard to put students in a group with others reading the title of their first choice, I didn't make this the priority that I would today. Essentially, if I thought the student's first choice was too difficult, I would put her/him with a group that was reading an easier book.

While all three of us in this project did the same thing on our first 'go' at literature circles, we unanimously agree that we won't do it again. Our inspiration to let readers self-select has come from the work of Kaye Lowe (2002) in *What's the Story?* Kaye writes movingly about the powerful, and sometimes lasting, effects of classroom 'reading' experiences, particularly those concerning book choice. I urge readers to take a look at Chapter 2 of this PETA publication the next time they consider forming reading groups.

It appears that there are at least two things common in the criteria struggling readers use to judge themselves. One is that they see reading as something they can do when they can read books of a certain 'level'. Through classroom experiences, they come to believe that reading is about making your way through the levels. The second criterion that struggling readers use is that of performance. As Kaye Lowe says (ibid:27), 'they are convinced that good reading *sounds* good — has lots of expression and is fluent. They use performance criteria to judge what is good and bad, and are often unaware that reading is about making meaning.'

By placing self-selection at the top of our priorities when forming literature circles, we have been able to include the range of literacies in our classrooms. I use 'literacies' as an alternative to 'abilities' to recognise that all children come to school with valid literacy understandings and practices that should not be characterised as deficits if they do not fit the conventional notion of 'school' literacy.

Achieving balance

A number of frameworks can be used to ensure that reading programs reflect a theorised balance. Queensland's Literate Futures project materials on the teaching of reading adopt the four-resource model (Muspratt, Luke & Freebody, 1997). The Literate Futures report (2000) warns of the dangers of implementing off-the-shelf commercial reading packages, since they 'may lead to unbalanced and unresponsive literacy programs' (p 75). Our team was aware of the potential for literature circles to be adopted as a meaningless wholesale 'package'. We therefore set out to determine how this practice stood up against the four-resource model. The table below summarises our findings.

Summariser	Code-breaker	Meaning-maker	Text user	Text analyst
Literary luminary	Y	Y	Y	N
Artful artist	Y	N	N	N
Word wizard	Y	Y	Y	N
Creative connector	Y	N	Y	N
Discussion director	Y	Y	Y	P
Showcase/Celebration	Y	Y	Y	P

Table 1: *Mapping literature-circle practices against the four resources*

Y *Yes, resource is clearly evident* P *Potential for resource to be evident.* N *No, resource not clearly evident.*

It became clear that literature circles, at least as we were using them, had the potential to lead a student into the practices of text analyst. However, the roles we were using hadn't yet achieved this aim. We needed to enhance our enactment of literature circles, and the work of a number of researchers and academics helped our endeavours. Drawing on the insights of Rowan (2001), Muspratt, Luke and Freebody (1997) and Raison et al. (2003), we developed two new functions for literature-circle participants: *investigator* and *paradigm profiler*. They are very much a work in progress.

investigator

In this role, a student considers the people and the attributes that the author leads the reader to value (or like), and reject (or dislike). The student selects one or two characters that seem to hold the most power, or are associated with the 'best bits'. The student then considers the attributes of these characters — physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural and so on — marking the textual clues that give this impression. The process is repeated for two characters who are not as powerful or as favourably exposed. The student makes and justifies a conclusion about the text's value position.

The investigator can also consider how the text might have looked if it had been told from a different point of view, or in another time and place. For example, s/he could select a character who claims little space in the text and propose why the author has limited this character's speech, thoughts and participation. The student could then describe an aspect of the story from that character's point of view. Others in the literature circle might then debate whether the investigator has got the 'voice' right.

Paradigm profiler

This is another role we are trialling as part of our efforts to introduce the text-analyst resource, inspired by the work of Leonie Rowan (2001). As with investigator, we acknowledge that this role may need further work, but we include it in a spirit of professional sharing, hoping it will inspire others to take our work further.

The paradigm profiler's task is to select two characters, then complete a profile for each using the paradigm sheet (see the figure below). In the literature circle, the profiler leads discussion about which character is most valued, giving reasons.

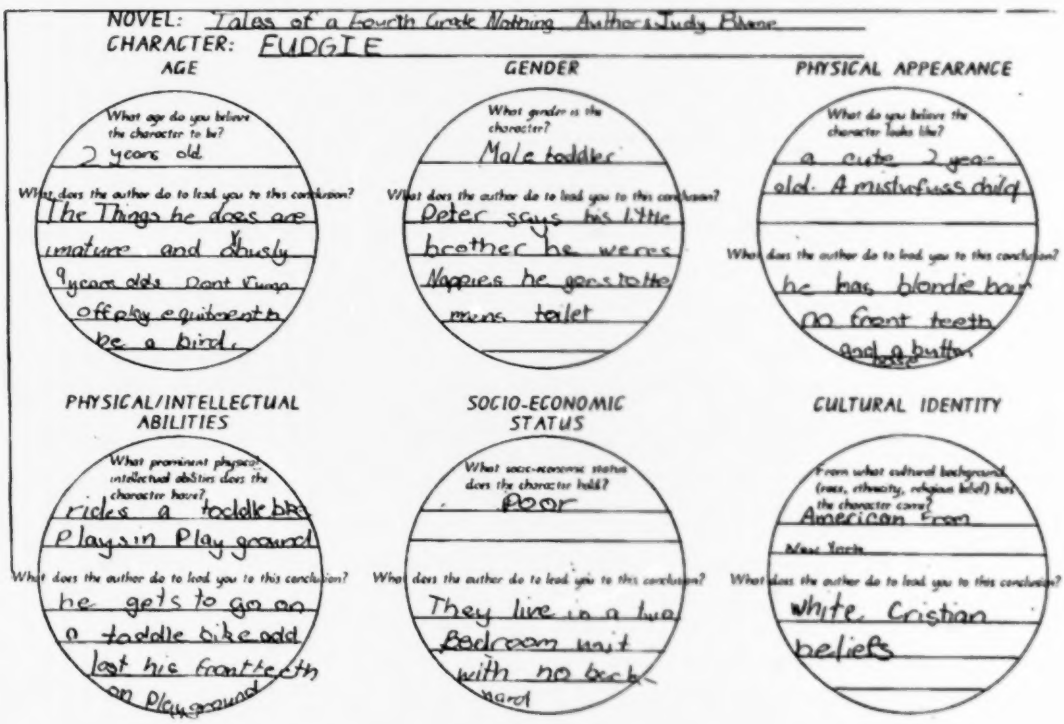
NOVEL: Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing Author: Judy Blume
CHARACTER: FUDGIE
AGE
What age do you believe the character to be?
2 years old
What does the author do to lead you to this conclusion?
The Things he does are immature and obviously 9 year olds Dont Jump off play equipment be a bird.
GENDER
What gender is the character?
Male toddler
What does the author do to lead you to this conclusion?
Peter says his little brother he wears Nappies he goes to the mens toilet
PHYSICAL APPEARANCE
What do you believe the character looks like?
a cute 2 year old. A mischievous child
What does the author do to lead you to this conclusion?
he has blondie hair no front teeth and a butter
PHYSICAL/INTELLECTUAL ABILITIES
What prominent physical/intellectual abilities does the character have?
rides a toddle bike Plays in Play ground
What does the author do to lead you to this conclusion?
he gets to go on a toddle bike and lost his front teeth on Playground
SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS
What socio-economic status does the character hold?
Poor
What does the author do to lead you to this conclusion?
They live in a two Bedroom unit with no back yard
CULTURAL IDENTITY
From what cultural background (race, ethnicity, religious belief) has the character come?
American From New York
What does the author do to lead you to this conclusion?
White Cristian beliefs

Figure 1: *A paradigm sheet completed by a Year 4 reader of Blume's (1980) 'Tales of a Fourth Grade Nothing'*

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Tales from the team

An evolving practice

JAN VERNEY

I began using literature circles with the aim of improving my reading program. I had heard of literature circles through Catherine Day, and investigated them further via the Internet sites she recommended. I simply picked out the parts I understood and felt I could try with my Year 6 class, then altered them to suit our needs.

One of the first challenges I encountered was *who* should read *which* novels. I felt uncomfortable allowing the lower-level readers to choose the more challenging books, and so I grouped the students according to ability. I soon learnt that this led to uninteresting group discussions and disruptive sessions (when the students ran their circles independently of a teacher). I now offer all novels to all students. However, when I provide an initial review of a book, I may highlight the size and complexity of the text to present a realistic view of what students will encounter.

Encouraging the students to take ownership of the circle sessions is quite challenging. Relinquishing ultimate control over the group is difficult; I'm still learning to do this. Because they are empowered to choose who goes first, who takes on what roles, what chapters are read etc., the students are beginning to run their circles with more confidence. There are occasions when the discussion dies out, though, and I find it necessary to ask open questions that aim to draw out rich and sustainable dialogue. After a group has worked together a few times, I sit out of the circle, leaving students with the responsibility of asking each other questions.

Increased independence, improved co-operative skills and better oral communication are among the benefits of literature circles. They also present a great opportunity to discover new things about students. This is particularly true when students assume the role of connector.

The students enjoy undertaking a different role each week, and it may be five or six weeks until they have to repeat a role. Even so, I like to give them the opportunity to have a preparation-free week. In that week, while they are still required to read the set chapters, they do not have a role for which they must prepare.

I firmly believe that the benefits of literature circles far outweigh the challenges. I have also found that literature circles, and the associated roles, are always evolving to suit the interests and abilities of our group. The greatest challenge, and the thing that would ultimately produce the greatest benefit, is to create roles in which students draw meaningfully on the practices of textual analysis.

Jan Verney is a Year 6 teacher at Goondiwindi State School, Queensland.

The benefits of peer support

DONNA ROSS

I introduced the literacy-circle roles one by one using a short, familiar text read to the whole class. Armed with this role familiarity, the students were then briefly introduced to a variety of novels. They were asked to choose which they would like to read, ranking their preferences. At this early point, I exercised an element of control in matching students with texts.

Once the circles were underway, timetabling emerged as an issue. Factoring literacy circles into the everyday school program — and sticking to the times regardless of distractions — became a great challenge. I devoted four to five half-hour daily sessions each week. It was difficult. However, because this was a reading activity that would not be included in every term or for extended periods of time, we considered it time well spent.

A great challenge of literacy circles is to relinquish teacher control and to trust the students enough to allow them to choose and read *any* novel. It is through giving students this opportunity that students' ownership and enjoyment is maximised. One student in my class, Adam, had a very limited sight-word vocabulary and minimal reading strategies. He had always longed to read *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Dahl, 1964). No other novel was of interest to him, and it became very clear that it was *my* job to facilitate the 'reading' of this novel. I discovered that the students in Adam's group wanted to take it in turns reading chapters aloud to him. It was a process that resulted in mutual enjoyment and the development of close friendships.

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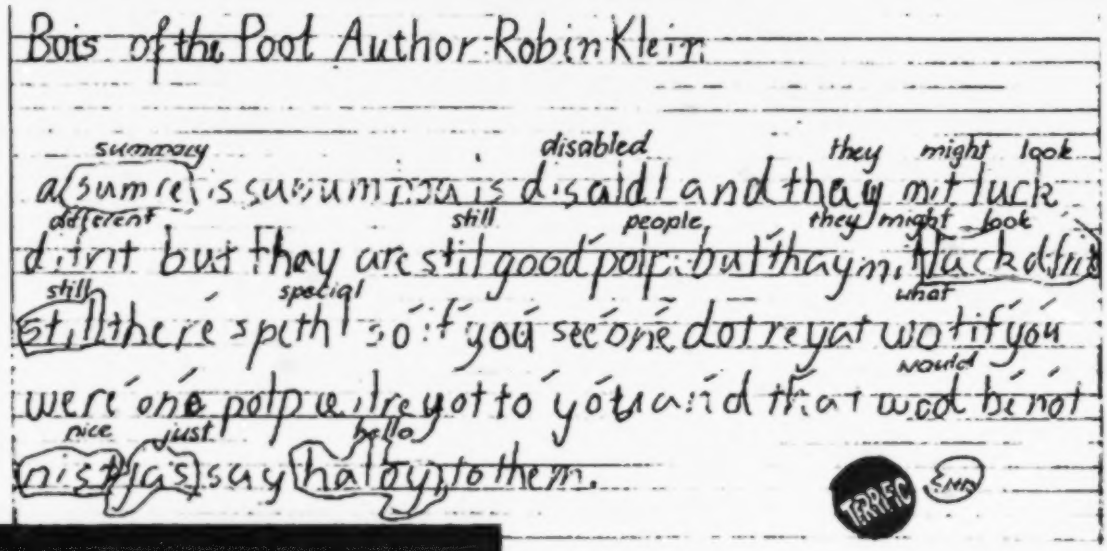
Boss of the Pool Author: Robin Klein
A summary is someone who is disabled and they might look different but they are still good people but they might look different still they are special so if you see one don't run away what if you were one of those people and they were terrible to you and that would not be nice just say hello to them.
TERRIFIC
EMMA

Figure 2: *Bill's summary of 'Boss of the Pool' (Klein, 1986). Before the introduction of literature circles, Bill wouldn't have had access to this text. It is unlikely that a response of such linguistic richness would have been elicited from a 'matched' (in this case, Reading Recovery Level 17) book.*

Here was a totally unexpected benefit. With access to students with a deeper level of understanding, Adam gained much more than he would have done from reading a 'matched' text, and he experienced an absolute enjoyment of the reading experience. This has confirmed my belief in the need for all students to have access to a variety of novels of their choice.

Self-selection has enabled a potpourri of 'levels' of students to come together in a literature circle. Without exception, the discussion in these groups has been rich and beneficial. It has enabled a deeper understanding for all involved. It has also created a strain on resources. I raised this issue with a group of ten students who had nominated the same book to share (our school buys the novels in sets of eight). There was no student who wished to miss out, nor to see another student miss out. So the students themselves decided to split into two groups and share their texts. They themselves had to facilitate and see this decision through. It was done without contention, and it demonstrated great appreciation for the needs of others.

The final teaching challenge was to take on the role of observer, rather than director, of group discussions. It is very much a learned role, but the group dynamics do change once the teacher bites the bullet and hands control over to the students.

Benefits

Through literature circles, students' ability to clarify, crystallise and justify their thoughts and ideas has improved dramatically. Their ability to celebrate the text with culminating activities is also an area that has developed — one that connects groups' experiences with the remainder of the class and helps to achieve closure.

In my classroom, students' roles have been open for negotiation and the students themselves have developed the roles further. For example, the artful artist does not simply produce a two-dimensional illustration but, rather, chooses a medium or adds dimension through the use of papier mache, dioramas etc. to 'illustrate' the text. All art activities are given a strict time limit; students are asked to bring in anything that the teacher cannot supply. This development has seen a quite feverish interest develop, particularly when sharing.

Donna Ross is a Year 4 teacher at Goondiwindi State School, Queensland.

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Valuing contributions

MELISSA VAN BAEL

When literature circles were first introduced to our classroom, I was looking for a strategy that would promote the enjoyment of reading — something notably lacking amongst many of my students — and would increase the level of critical thought, while broadening students' horizons.

My first and perhaps greatest challenges were to determine how to group my students and how to select their texts. In the end, the former challenge was actually determined by the latter. Following from all I had read and heard on literature circles, I was keen to have the students select their own texts. That meant I had to look at what our options were when it came to multiple copies. I wanted the students to read an Australian novel. With this in mind, I located one of the catalogues that proliferate in our school. The selected catalogue had a cover picture and synopsis of every book. I selected approximately ten, then asked the students to decide which three we would read. As it happened, all were able to have their first choice.

The resulting groups were certainly multi-ability, and the effects of this were interesting. The main thing I noticed was that the students' ability levels did nothing to increase or decrease interest or enjoyment. One novel stood out for the excitement, curiosity and rabid discussion that it generated. The four students who made up this group ranged in age from 8–10. While some found it difficult to read the text, all enjoyed it immensely.

All of us in the class initially anticipated that discussion director would be the most difficult role, due especially to the challenge of developing 'fat' questions. However, it quickly became apparent that the most problematic role was connector. The students found it hard to connect at all to the characters. Further class discussion made it apparent that the students were being so literal that they could not make associations with the characters or their experiences. For example, in the book *Greylands* (Carmody, 1997), the students could not see how to identify with a child whose mother had recently died (their own mothers, after all, were alive and well). It was only through continual discussion that we enlarged the concept of 'connection' so that students were able to make meaningful (as opposed to literal) links.

At times I found it difficult to step back and leave my reaction or bias out of the conversation. This was particularly difficult when the conversation seemed to be going nowhere. In hindsight, I think the reason for conversational dead-ends lay mostly in my teaching of the roles. I should have taken a longer time introducing the concept of *talking about books*. The students seemed to think that once they had shared their role, they had finished playing their part. As a result, I have altered my teaching approach. At the beginning of a new cycle, the whole class is introduced, or reintroduced, to the roles, and we have a literature-circle discussion as a class. I am finding that the students have fantastic ideas that they often do not recognise as being valid. I now realise that when students told me that they couldn't find anything for their role — something that was quite common — it is very likely that they actually believed they had nothing *of any value* to add.

The other challenge I faced was to ensure that the students were being engaged as text analysts. I worked on developing a new role born out of literature-circle discussions. The role focused on characters, and how they are developed by the author. Initially this role took on the guise of 'character cracker'. Over time, this has evolved into the roles of investigator and paradigm profiler that are outlined earlier in this *PEN*.

I fully recognise that this is only the beginning of developing text analysis, but it is a good start. In the future, I hope to create new roles to promote more critical thought. I am also looking forward to relating literature circles to texts other than novels, and I am planning some work with visual texts from film and television. I am also interested in applying literature circles to ICTs by integrating websites and software.

Melissa Van Bael is multi-age (Years 3–7) teacher from Lundavra State School, a remote, two-teacher school in Queensland.

From here

Melissa's story has prefaced how we see the future for literature circles. Our aim is to polish up our text-analyst roles, and to apply the model to group readings of other texts — not just traditional print literature.

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About the author

Catherine Day began teaching in 1980. She has taught in a variety of settings, including rural and metropolitan primary school classes, multi-age primary classes, secondary humanities classes and post-Year 10 transition classes. She has also acted as a support teacher for students with learning difficulties. Since 2000, Catherine has been the coordinator of the Goondiwindi State School Learning and Development Centre (Literacy).

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